

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly

VOLUME XX No. 3

1990

THE CESARE RATTI FAMILY OF PROCTOR, VERMONT



Cesare Augusta Ratti, master sculptor, Vermont Marble Company, Proctor, Vermont; born in Carrara, Italy, December 17, 1862; died at Proctor July 17, 1941

Introduction

By Jean C. Ross
Managing Editor

The latter part of the 19th century brought a great stream of emigration from Europe. Families came for social, political and economic reasons. Between 1880 to 1920 there were as many as 20 nationalities represented in Proctor alone. Many came to work in the marble industry. The Italians who came from Northern Italy were literate, highly skilled carvers, sculptors and cutters. By 1881 Colonel Redfield Proctor had acquired all of the surrounding small marble companies and established the Vermont Marble Company. He made trips to Europe to hire trained workers. The immigrants paid for their own passage or reimbursed the company once they were in Proctor. They paid in those early days \$11 board per month. Wages varied from \$1.25 to \$3.00 per day, depending upon the job responsibility.

Mr. Proctor set up a company store and established The Sutherland Club for men and Cavendish House for women, where English could be taught, where orientation to the cultural life in America could be shared and social events could gather.

Cesare* Ratti was a sculptor from Carrara, Italy, who was recruited by Col. Proctor in 1888. The family at that time consisted of his grandmother, his wife and two little boys. Eventually, there were six more children. Three of the sons, Carrado, Amerigo, and Hugo, remained in the marble business as adults. It was Gino, the second son, born in 1885, who wrote a history of the family in 1973. Gino had gone on to college, was principal of the high school in Pittsford, Vermont, at the age of 24. He went on to earn a Ph.D. and was a Dean at Butler University in Indiana until his retirement. He was apparently in his late 80s when he wrote this history of his family.

Space does not permit the printing of the entire document, but the edited portions do portray the courage and problems of assimilation experienced by the immigrants who sought our shores a hundred years ago.

*Pronounced as Ché za ray.

Coming to America in 1888

By Gino Ratti

It is an oft-repeated story of how my brother Corrado had fallen while we were running to catch a train in Marseilles, France—a train that was to take us across the whole continent to Rotterdam, Holland. The serious part of the story is that Corrado was carrying a bottle of drinking water that we needed on the train. The bottle broke and left a great gash in the hand of the little four-year old. Old Grandma wrapped a handkerchief around the bleeding hand and I am told we just managed to get ourselves on the last car with our baggage, some bread and cheese for us to eat on the train, and most importantly, with Corrado weeping and shouting in Carrarera dialect, “All my guts are coming out!”

What were we doing in Marseilles and why were we running to catch the train for Rotterdam, and why did a bottle of water figure so prominently in my story? The year was 1888. We were on our way to America to rejoin our father who was anxiously waiting for us in New York. He had come several months before and after working for a while with the Torrey Brothers in Boston had saved enough money to buy us steerage tickets from Genoa to New York. The tickets did not cost much, about \$35 apiece for adults, and I don't know how much for us children (Corrado was not quite four years old and I was less than three). The competition was so keen between the steamship companies that they often gave each immigrant the wool blanket used during the crossing. It appears that it was cheaper than having the blankets deodorized and cleaned.

The day we were to embark for New York at Genoa news of cholera in several of the ports on the Mediterranean caused the American authorities to stop all embarkation from that place. Those of us who had our passports and prepaid tickets were taken care of by shipping us overland and packing us into already overcrowded ships sailing for New York from the northern European ports.

In the French trains in those days each car was divided transversally into four compartments, each holding eight passengers. There were rough wooden benches facing each other. One entered from the station platform by two high steps. When the train started, a trainman closed and locked the outside door and you were locked in until he re-opened it at the first stop at which time, if you were lucky, you might find toilet facilities. The time between stops might vary from one to three hours. The car we rode in was no better than a cattle car, dirty, smelly, unventilated.

We were locked up in our compartment for several hours and we badly missed the water from Corrado's bottle. It took us at least two days to get to Rotterdam, not a very luxurious way to travel, especially with a great-grandmother and two little boys. I have often marveled at my mother's pluck! Few people realized how bad things were in the steerage on the transatlantic vessels. There were large rooms especially for single men and others for those travelling as families; no privacy, such as came to be the rule several years later when staterooms were made almost the rule. Women with small children were housed in one large room that extended across the whole ship. The groups arranged their cots and baggage to outline an area that they considered their special territory. People stood in line for food and drink. When the

weather was bad a group never had a chance to go out on deck for a breath of fresh air. I have the impression that we were not able to go out for the whole time of the crossing, which was roughly two weeks.

When we landed in New York it was at Castle Garden, a place near the Battery. Ellis Island was not in existence then. We went through the customs and were met by Father who took us and our baggage to Grand Central Station in a horse car that ran north of Canal Street to the station where we boarded a third-class car of the New York Central, changed at Albany, New York, and finally landed at a dirty little station in Center Rutland where Dad was employed in the Vermont Marble Company's shop. The company found us what was a very large apartment in the Old Ripley Home, not far from the shop. The house had been built by Mr. Ripley who owned a grist mill on the bank of Otter Creek not far from the marble works. The mill had not been running for several years and there were two or three families living in various parts of the ramshackle old building.

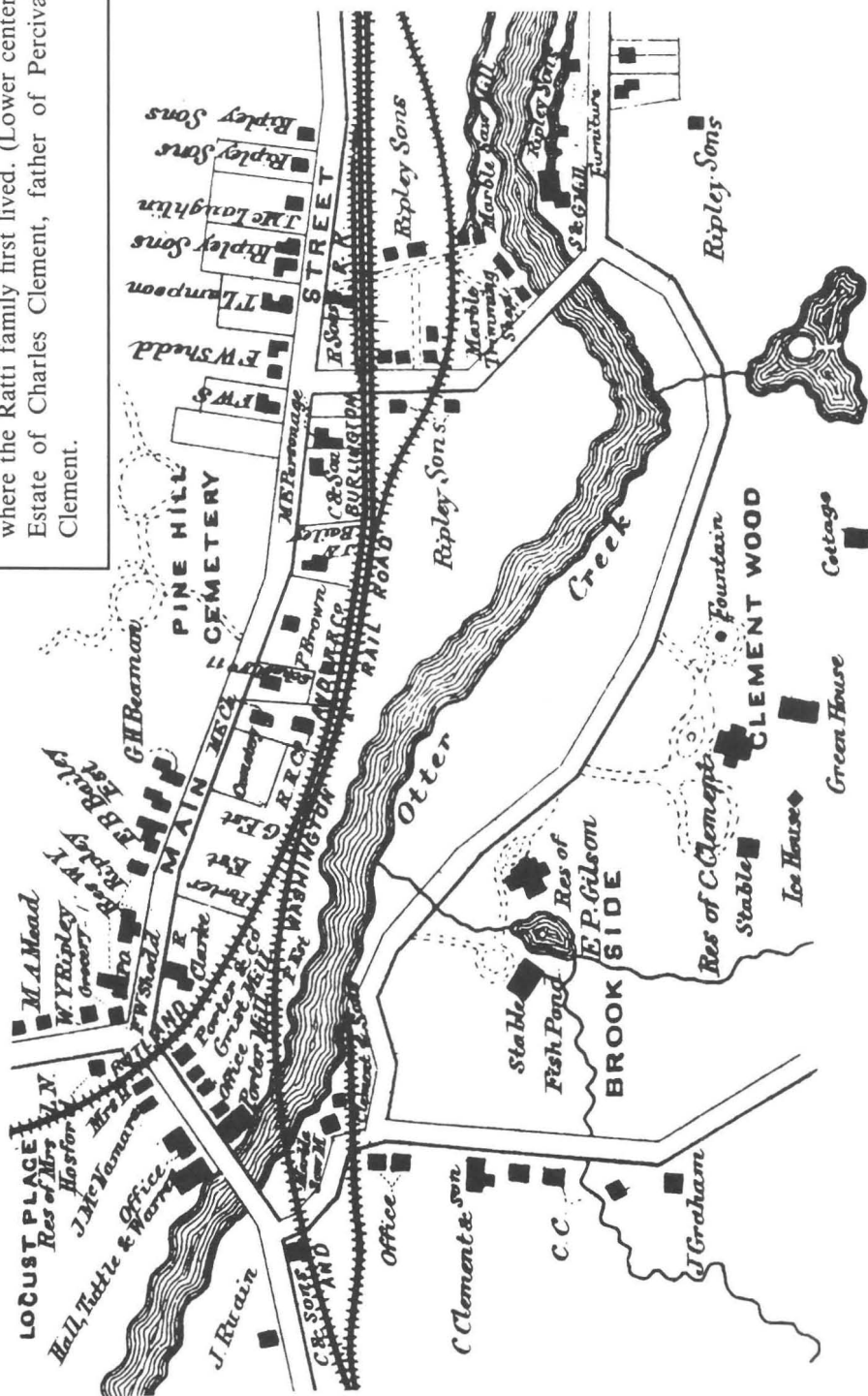
About a half-mile from the Ripley home there was a prententious home of the most important political family in those days (I have forgotten the name)¹ but one day the news was spread around that these people were going to entertain Grover Cleveland, the President of the United States. All of us kids walked about a half mile to witness the event. We lined up on the opposite side of the road from the house and watched open-eyed as elegant carriages filled with people in rich costumes and high silk hats drove up to the door and the President and his party were given what has been called red-carpet treatment. A bright red carpet lay between the drive and the house. To cap the climax, one of the servants passed along the information that the party was to be served dinner on solid silver plates and it would be eaten with solid silver forks, spoons and knives. None of us had ever heard of such things and we were duly impressed. I was a little three-year-old Italian kid who crossed the Atlantic by way of Rotterdam, Holland, and had a chance to see a real, live president of the U.S.A.

Old Grandma (Angela Bianchi Bertolotti)

It never occurred to us that there was anything unusual about Grandma. We children, especially the boys, somehow took her for granted. She was one of us, a pal. When I say we children I mean, of course, we five boys and three girls. I don't know by what magic "Old Grandma" cast a spell over the male members of the family, but she did. Even our father felt the attraction of her personality. At *his* tender age of three he packed his belongings in a red bandana handkerchief and went across the city of Carrara (Italy) in order to live with her. His own mother had died in childbirth and his father had remarried. There is no reason to suppose that his step-mother abused him or neglected him. She was not that kind of person, but his grandmother throughout those three years had been his ideal and in his childish mind she was the one who should look after him. The older folks in the family agreed and from that time until she died many decades later he was her little boy.

¹*Evidently the home of Percival W. Clement, born in 1846. Died in 1927. Was a prominent businessman and state politician; governor of Vermont in 1919.*

CENTER RUTLAND – (Lower right) Locations of buildings adjacent to the Ripley Sons grist mill where the Ratti family first lived. (Lower center) Estate of Charles Clement, father of Percival Clement.



In time little Cesare grew up. He went to school, learned a trade as a marble worker, first doing the rough work of squaring up the blocks of marble blasted out of the mountainside at the quarries. Later he worked in the shops in town and became an excellent marble carver. Eventually he became a self-taught sculptor, so good at it that the Vermont Marble Company offered him a job in their marble works in Proctor, Vermont, after he came to this country. His grandfather having died, grandma made her home with him and helped bring up his children just as she had done for him. It was a perfectly normal situation and no one thought it unusual for the diminutive little great-grandmother to care for us children.

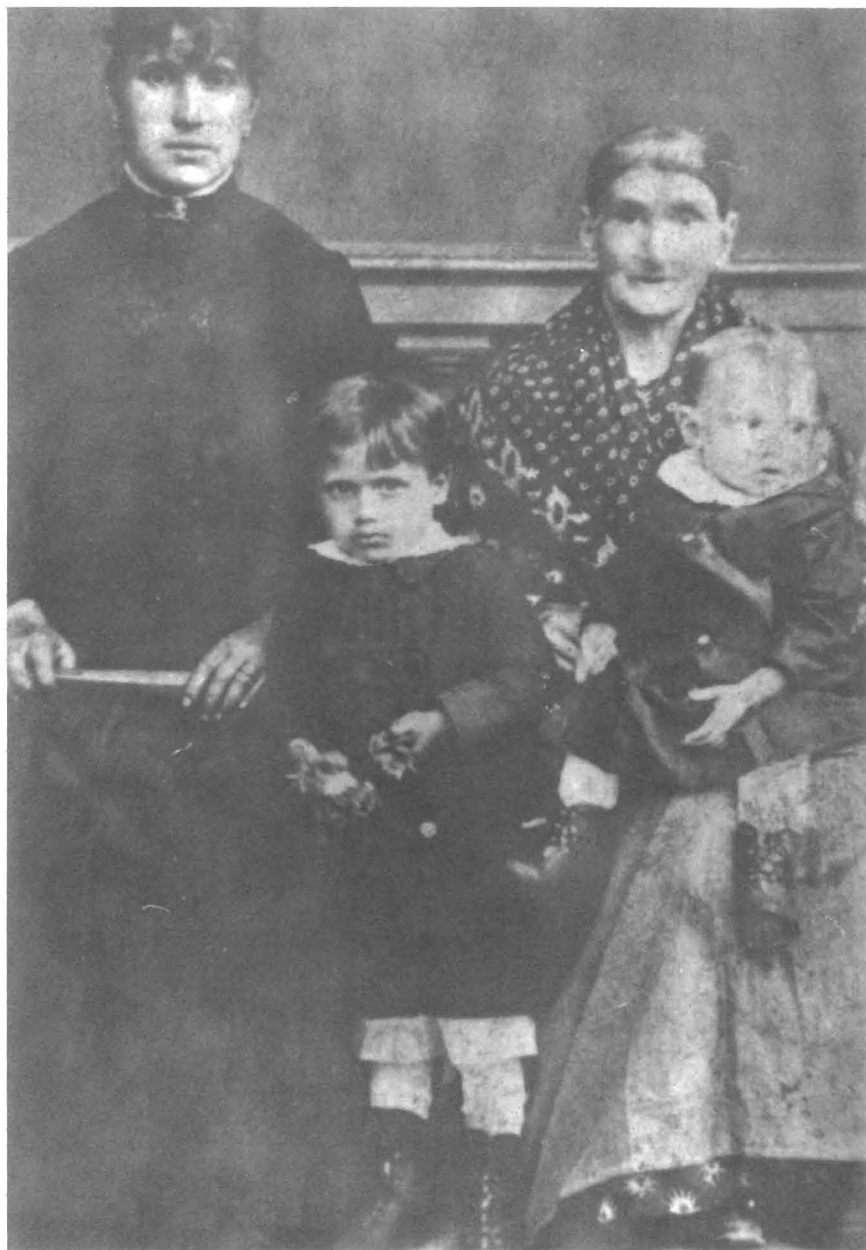
It was only after I had grown up and had a wife of my own that my wife one day made the remark that she was sorry she had never had the privilege of knowing "Old Grandma." I asked her why she said that and she replied that in all the time she had known us we children never got together for any reason without starting to talk about "Old Grandma" and telling stories about her lovingly and enthusiastically. Grandma was a real personality, one who contributed powerfully to the building of our lives.

Grandma's birthdate was not known. When the family came to America her name appeared on the passport but there was no record of her birth because the records of her native village had been destroyed during one of the many wars that had plagued the country. The official making out the document merely guessed her age to be about 75 and so stated in the passport. That was in 1887 and, according to his figure, she was born in 1811. That can hardly be the case since she often told of her childhood and one event definitely establishes the fact that she must have been several years older, since she clearly remembered the day when her father came home from the war in which Napoleon invaded Russia and was driven back in 1812. I remember that when she died in 1903 the doctor said she was undoubtedly over one hundred years old.

Her birthplace was a little village just south of Genoa, Italy, on the Mediterranean Sea. Grandma never learned a word of English and even her Italian left much to be desired. In fact, she spoke a kind of Genoese dialect which the rest of the family understood but did not speak fluently. Grandma's language was more French than Italian.

As always happened to normally healthy people before the world learned about birth control, once they were settled in America, my parents were blessed, as they thought, by a continuous arrival of babies.² Mother did her best to care for us all but even her abundant energy and maternal devotion did not suffice. To aggravate the situation the family had the tendency to take in all the stray relatives who came our way, not to mention friends and fellow countrymen from across the Atlantic. The house was always filled to overflowing. Feeding and doing the laundry for anywhere from ten to twelve or thirteen people was too much for her and so the care of the younger children fell on Grandma's willing shoulders. That was before "The Care and the Feeding of Babies" was even thought of. While the babies were nursing, that was a minor problem. After they were weaned, Grandma took over. She did not have the baby foods that nowadays one gets in the supermarkets. They had

²*Corrado, Gino, Amerigo, Aldo, Hugo, Elda, Lydia, Blanche*



Luigia Franchini Ratti (L), mother of Corrado and Gino who sits on the lap of his great grandmother, Angela Bianchi Bertolotti

not been invented. But she did cram our mouths with vegetables, oatmeal and other gruels, corn starch puddings and pap. For those who have never heard of pap, it is the most nauseating thing ever devised as an article of food! Grandma's pap consisted of slices of stale bread soaked in milk or warm water and worked up into a sticky, sloppy mess. Sometimes she would add butter or, if she used water to start with, she put in a bit of garlic and some olive oil. Taking the child in her lap she would start feeding it, not with a spoon, but with a gob of sticky mess between her thumb and first two fingers. She would pry open the mouth and stuff it in. If she had used a spoon it might have hurt the baby, but with her fingers she avoided hurting it and at the same time managed to pry the mouth open and insert the nourishment. If the youngster let the food drop from his mouth, she shoved it back in with her fingers and saw to it that it stayed there very much as a mason with his trowel forces the mortar between two bricks.

All through her life Grandma retained her hearing and keen eyesight. She could not have weighed more than 100 pounds in all her later life, but she ate cakes, pies, doughnuts, all sorts of meats and vegetables, as well as all fruits and berries in season. Never did she complain of an upset stomach.

At about the time that school let out in early June the berry season started—first, wild strawberries, then raspberries and blueberries for the picking and later on black raspberries which we called blackcaps and other regular blackberries which we called long-jacks. The hills were covered with all that!

The berry season brought out in Grandma the girlhood memories of days in the hills beside the Mediterranean. If we boys went berrying, so would she. And we raised no objection for she was a good sport and a regular pal. Besides, Mother felt safer if Grandma went along with us. Now the Green Mountains are not very high but high enough to call for considerable agility and stamina to climb them. The best berry fields were high up on the mountain sides and many were as much as a couple of miles from home through the woods, across pastures with dangerous-looking bulls and over rough trails. But that was where she was at her best. With a cord tied around her waist in order to hold her skirts up over her shoe-tops, a blue bandana tied around her head to hold in her hair, Grandma would set off at a fast pace leading the gang to the best berrying lots. I can still see her crawling under a barbed-wire fence when a fierce bull threatened us, chasing him with sticks or stones to insure that we kids could make it to safety before she dropped flat on her belly and crawled to safety.

I can see her in my mind's eye as we would sit beside an ice-cold spring gushing out of the West Mountain after we had filled our buckets with luscious wild red raspberries. And she too would slake her thirst at the spring because, as she said, "Even water is good to drink if it is cold and pure." Remember, all this was when Grandma was well over 90 years old.

There were always three or four of us, counting Grandma. Each one returned home with anywhere from seven to ten quarts. Mother had difficulty in using up the supply of berries, especially as there were times when we went berrying almost every day in the height of the season. Try as she might she could not use them all. On such occasions we went around the neighborhood and sold the surplus to those who had

no children to gather berries for them. We got ten cents a quart for berries, although the going price usually was about twenty-five cents.

Every penny we earned in this way we put away in a sugar-bowl in the pantry. At the end of the season we counted our money and arranged for us to have a blow-out. We would take the train to Rutland; we boys, three or four of us some years, and Grandma. You can picture the scene at the station in Rutland as the gang descended on the town: a little old wisp of a woman in a clean calico dress, a bandana over her head and knotted under her chin, and a group of boys ranging in ages from seven or eight to twelve or thirteen. Grandma, lively, excited, twittering like a bird in her Genoese dialect. Of course, on our return home we always brought back bags of "store cookies" and especially a lot of cream-puffs which were the specialty of the bakery in Rutland.

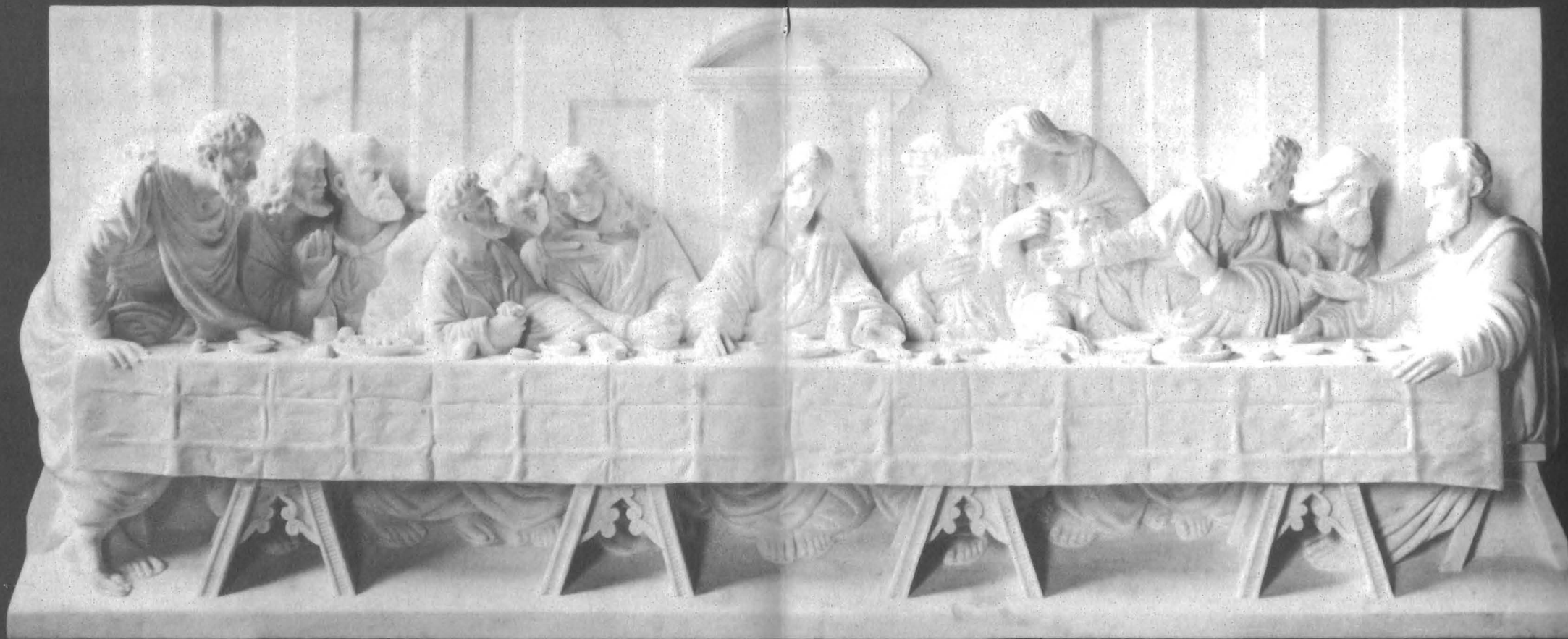
Grandma's eyes were very good. She never had to wear glasses and until the day of her death she could thread a needle. So, it was natural that she should do a bit of sewing and mending from time to time.

Although her sight and hearing were still excellent, her judgment left something to be desired. In short, Grandma was getting old. We finally had to admit that fact, much as we hated to. One day Grandma, out of a clear sky, announced that she was going to die the next day. We all poo-hooed the idea and told her that she had nothing the matter with her that a good night's rest could not remedy. So she went to bed and during the night she died quietly and peacefully. The doctor who examined her said that he could not find a single cause for her death, except that her whole system had given out at the same time. As in the poem, "The Deacon's One-Horse Shay," the Ratti clan cannot assemble without starting to reminisce about "Old Grandma."

Mom (Luigia Franchini Ratti)

Mother was the real center of the family. In addressing our parents, if we spoke in Italian, we addressed them as "Mama" or "Babba" as is usual in Italy. Among us children English was the usual linguistic vehicle of communication. Then we called them "Pa" and "Ma" or, if we were on our dignity, we referred to them as "Dad" and "Mom." The latter carried a certain element of respect and love that has been hard to explain to those who are not members of the family.

In her youth Mom attended a school for girls that was run by the nuns. There she was taught reading, a little arithmetic, writing, and good manners, as was becoming to the young ladies of her day. She learned to sew, knit and embroider, but she had to depend on outside sources for information about history and literature. What she knew about political affairs in Italy she picked up from the conversation in the home. Her father and brothers were active in politics but not of the sort we know here in America today. They were ardent republicans, which in those days meant people who were working to change from a monarchy to a republic. That was a dangerous kind of politics then. Those who were with Garibaldi, Cavour and Mazzini had to watch



The Last Supper, based on the painting by Leonardo DaVinci, one of six bas reliefs

carved in marble by Cesare Ratti about 1901

their step lest they be summarily dealt with by the police. Her father was one of the top men in the local group, her eldest brother was secretary. They worked carefully within the law but always in danger of making some little slip that might lead to trouble with the authorities. When Italy was finally modernized and united, the republicans were double-crossed and a limited monarchy was set up instead of the republic her father and brothers had worked for. Garibaldi and Mazzini were made to see that Italy would be better off with a limited monarchy under Victor Emmanuel. They were disappointed but finding that resistance was in vain, they stopped all republican propaganda and accepted the inevitable but remained staunch republicans at heart. This political atmosphere in her home made Mom very willing to come to America when Dad was offered a good job in Vermont. In political matters Mom had a better idea of what democracy might be than did those Vermont friends who were born here and had no practical experience in that area. Of course, in those days women were not supposed to meddle with political affairs, but once in a while she expressed doubt of the wisdom of our political set-up or, rather, our kind of democracy.

As the family grew in size, Mom put to use those talents that she had developed in the convent school. She made many of her own clothes and all of the children's. In winter we were always kept warm with stockings she had knitted for us, as well as mittens and neck scarfs, all made of the finest wool. If she had a few moments to spare, she embroidered bed linen, towels and articles of clothing, especially for the girls. Unlike Pa, Mom had a reasonable amount of schooling, and she read a great deal when there were moments of leisure. In later years I was amazed at the breadth of her reading — Italian, of course, but there were many translations of French and English authors. Most of what she read were novels, but they were the best of the kind, Scott, Hugo and Dumas, for instance. She learned to speak and read English very well but with a marked Italian twist to it all. The greatest trouble that English gave her was that she ignored our silent letters in the words of Anglo Saxon origin. For instance, for her Wednesday had a "d" that she carefully sounded. In words of Latin derivation she had no trouble, so she chose them in preference to the shorter but unpronounceable English one. However, I must not leave the impression that her speech was not clear. It was quaint but understandable. Proof of this is that she had many friends among the English-speaking ladies of the town and was often entertained by them, for they knew that she had something to say on many subjects and her words were words of wisdom, although sometimes strangely pronounced. She rarely went to the Union Church which we children attended but was very active in the work of the women's groups. She was very much interested in school affairs and she knew our teachers from the principal and superintendent down. Mom never missed a single one of the lectures and concerts that the town had every winter. In those days the so-called lecture series included such men as William Jennings Bryan, Booker T. Washington, Perry, the Arctic explorer, and Uncle Joe Cannon, the congressional leader from Illinois for many years. Mom heard them all. Then too, we had musical programs by the Apollo Quartet, the Tyrolean singers and many others.

My earliest recollections were of her singing as she worked about the house. Most of her songs were ballads that were popular in Italy in her times, many with a patriotic subject: Garibaldi's Hymn, some whose names I never knew, but whose intent was clear. She sang "Vogliami Nizza e Savoia, libera d'ai francesi. . ." (We must have

Nice and Savoy freed from the Frenchmen. . .). For a person with no formal musical education Mom had a good knowledge of about a score of operas, Italian, French and German, that were popular in her days. She knew most of the great arias of these operas and, what is more, she sang them in a beautiful soprano. Of course she sang only in Italian. All one had to do was to suggest some opera and that was all that was necessary to make Mom and Dad start singing in solos and duets. They would go from one opera to another and if there were other Italians present that went on all evening. All of us children got this love of music from our parents, but I must confess that none have had any formal musical training. Neither did Dad and Mom have any such training but that made no difference; they loved music and so did all the family.

Ours was a home in which there were two women who got along very well. Mom and Grandma supplemented each other and I never heard a strong word pass between them. They loved the same family and did all they knew how to make things go smoothly. Until the end of her childbearing Mom had all she could do to be a good mother. Grandma was a sort of super mother to us, but she never presumed to intrude into areas which belonged to Mom.

With food for the family, Mom was unsurpassed; not only did she look out for our daily needs but, as was necessary in those days, she had to lay in supplies for the long Vermont winters. She canned fruit and vegetables; she made a tomato paste that I have never seen anywhere else. At the height of the tomato season she took literally bushels of the ripe fruit and boiled them down in a large wash boiler until they were of the consistency that permitted her to spread the paste on a number of roofing slates that she kept for that purpose. These were put out in the sun to dry out, stirring the paste to keep it of uniform texture. Finally, she scraped the stuff off, moulded it into balls that would fit into the mouth of a quart jar. She then covered it all with a layer of olive oil to exclude moisture and germs and put all the jars away for winter use. A piece of this paste the size of a golf ball served for making tomato sauce for the various forms of macaroni, from spaghetti to ravioli, and meat dishes that are so dear to Italians. In cooking the paste she added a lot of spices and herbs that gave it an exquisite treat, in however form it was used.

In the division of household work, there was one area where there was regular cooperation: bread making. Mom made bread for the family each week. Baker's bread was rarely eaten in our home and only in cases of necessity. Mom mixed the ingredients in a huge bread mixer but when it came to kneading the dough, even her strong arms were not equal to the task. Then Dad took over. The next morning we were in for a treat. The bread had risen overnight and Mom would take a great hunk of it and cut it into floured strips which she fried in deep fat. My mouth waters at the memory.

There was one other matter in which Dad was in full control. After supper every Saturday night Dad would make a regular ceremony of winding the clock which was in the kitchen. We all watched respectfully as he performed the ritual. After all, it was the prerogative of the head of the family.

There was never any doubt as to who was the Center and leader of our family. We respected Pa and loved him, but he rarely made decisions that concerned the

family as a whole. He was interested in the home, he adored the children, gave us advice and saw to it that we lived up to the standards of behavior, but he never found it necessary to discipline us. When he had a big contract with the "Company" to carve a series of statues and was paid in what we considered in those days a very large sum, he always handed it all over to Mom. It was Mom who decided who needed new clothes, when we should pay the taxes, or that the house needed a new coat of paint. She deposited the modest surplus in the bank. She even decided what should be sent back to Italy, if anyone there needed help. So long as he had his cigars, his drink and a comfortable home to come to when his work was done, he was satisfied to forget about those things.

Mom was a good sport in the true sense of the word. She liked the outdoor life and could outwalk many persons half her age when she was a grandmother who had borne nine children.³ She left a host of friends, and not a single enemy when she died. Her sons-in-law and daughters-in-law loved her as we, her children, loved "Old Grandma." There can be no greater praise than that. May her soul rest in peace! Requiescat in pace!

Dad (Cesare Augusta Ratti)

In his way, Dad was an unusual man and I am just beginning to appreciate him as he deserved. I have noted in little sketches how Mother and Grandma molded our lives and character, but I fear I have not done Dad justice. In his way he was the typical "pater familias" of his day, that is, in the Italian way. But he had a large fund of human wisdom that was expressed in unexpected flashes in Latin and Italian sayings, in humorous anecdotes or folk stories that astonish me when I think that his formal education ended in a grade school, run by some lay brothers of the Catholic church, but which left not a trace of religion in his outlook on life. Perhaps that was the source of his Latin proverbs and his strict moral code. He knew no Latin but he knew the meaning of Latin phrases with which he peppered his conversation. As he went through life he picked up all sorts of information about all sorts of subjects, from Italian and mediaeval history, to socialistic theory, to the finding and cooking of edible mushrooms.

Dad in his day, had no match as a gardener. He took a sterile sand bank back of our house and by proper tillage, watering and fertilization, he made it into a garden that became a show-place for the neighbors. He was especially skilled in selective breeding of fruits and vegetables. For instance, by this method he produced a kind of tomato that excelled all others then available, in meatiness and flavor. Besides, he trellised his plants so that they could spread over a wide area and kept on yielding crop after crop of fruit that would have taken first prize at the county fair. I counted 68 big, ripe tomatoes on a typical plant.

He had a friend in New York who supplied him with all sorts of European foods. We had tunafish and anchovies on our menu before the native Vermonters had ever

³*One child died in infancy.*

heard of them. Through his efforts, the company store began to import olive oil, Parmesan, Romano and Holland cheeses. Stockfish from Norway mystified the good old Yankee families but when I brought home friends from college and they ate some as Mother prepared it, they always wanted more.

Each autumn at "hog-killing time" we bought a whole carcass of pork and then Dad was in his glory. He cut it up into roasts, steaks and hams. He made headcheese, lard, bacon, etc. but his *chef-d'oeuvre* was pork sausage. He ground the meat just so, seasoned it with just the right amount of herbs and spices and the whole family spent an evening around the kitchen table stuffing sausages. I have never tasted any better than the ones he made. I never knew where he picked up this knowledge of handling pork but it certainly was amazing in a man who had never lived in the rural areas until he came to America and, even here, had never raised a hog.

Another skill that Dad possessed came to him in some mysterious way. One Fourth of July he made a great assortment of fireworks, mostly rockets. The process was rather complicated and I shudder when I think what might have happened to us as we pulverized blasting powder and charcoal and did other things no child would be allowed to do nowadays. He made mixtures of various metal filings and things he got at the drugstore, packed them into the bodies of the rockets which he had made of paste and ordinary brown paper, and by fitting them with little balls of charcoal powder, pulverized blasting powder and the various kinds of chemicals and metal filings. He produced a professional effect that still amazes me. Most of the work with explosives was done when they were damp, so there was no real danger of accident. The rockets were allowed to dry out for weeks before they were shot up. Incidentally, Dad used an ordinary playing marble that he placed in the rocket just above the part containing the propellant mixture, so that when that had burned out and the rocket was in the air, the marble would drop down and the chamber full of color balls and powder would be hot enough to explode the charge and send the color balls and streamers out into the air.

Up until now I have not mentioned that Dad was an artist, a self-taught sculptor. As a boy in Italy he worked marble, doing heavy manual work. Later on, he became a marble cutter and learned a great deal about the nature and structure of the stone. In the shop he observed the older men more experienced than he. He picked up knowledge of art and art forms. He also was in demand at the Academy of Fine Arts where he served as a model for the sculptors. They found him ideal as a model of a young man. When he turned from being a fine carver of marble (*ornatista*) into a budding sculptor no one knows. Eventually he was "the sculptor" of the Vermont Marble Company in Proctor, Vermont. His skill grew and little by little he passed from the status of a maker of soldiers' monuments, with full-sized models some one else had made, into the status of a sculptor in his full right. Cesare Ratti carved the first scenes of the Last Supper which are in St. Mary's Church, Whitehall, New York.⁴

⁴Apparently a lapse in the memory of the author. No trace can be found of the marble altar pieces in Whitehall. Mary Margaret Ratti, the author's daughter-in-law, verifies three general locations: the State of Washington, New York State and Australia.

Images of saints and soldiers still dot American public squares, cemeteries and churches, of crucifixes that he turned out by the score, but his real and original work was done in unorthodox ways. Someone would bring in a couple of photographs, a full face view and a profile of some person and ask him to make a bas-relief or a bust of the man. Perhaps a priest would ask him to make a figure of an angel holding in her hands a holy water font. In such cases he would ask my sister Lydia to serve as a model, and somehow, out of a block of marble would come an angelic image of my sister.

When he used a plaster model, as he often did, it was a small and sometimes inadequate one. He would take the most important high spots of the thing and cut the block of marble down to the important fixed point. Then by a series of mathematical operations and calculations he would fix all the essential points before beginning to rough-out the figure. If the model was small and an odd fractional proportion of the finished statue, he had methods of getting the exact measurements that mystified most people who watched him. These were based on geometry and trigonometry, about which he knew absolutely nothing, but he always got the right answers. Question: How do you figure the distance from the nose to an elbow if the model is $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and you are carving a colossal figure that is 9 feet 7 inches? He did it!

Dad was interested in his work. He liked music, but could not read a note. Still, he knew most of the baritone part in about twenty then popular operas. Mother sang the soprano parts and all one had to do to get them started was to ask how a certain aria went in a given opera. That would be good for a whole evening of opera. Dad had sung in the chorus of the Carrara Opera House in Italy.

There were other things that Dad liked. Being an Italian of the old school, he had the cellar stocked with wine, cider, beer and liquors of all sorts. He served them to company, and drank them at table, but always in moderation. In winter the supply in the cellar would have stocked the cellar of a good saloon. One of the things that sticks in my memory is when he and a couple of Italian friends decided to make their own wine from grapes they had bought from a Fredonia, New York, grower. The grapes came in a big box car and we all went to the railroad switch to help unload them. I believe we kids and those of the neighbors ate more grapes than those finally made into wine. The wine was good but when Dad estimated the quantity of wine he got after we were through eating the grapes, he decided that thenceforth he would buy a 50-gallon cask of Claret from some Californian.

When we lived on Terrace Hill in Proctor, just before Dad built our home on Patch Hill, there was a huge rock maple tree about 100 yards from the house. It had large spreading branches so big that Dad and his friends in the neighborhood worked out a scheme for building a sort of tree house (for adults) among the branches. It worked out beautifully. Everybody helped and when it was done, there was a platform, about 15 feet from the ground. There was a rail all around the thing, with seats built around the platform and facing the center of attraction for all the men. A beer keg was set in the crotch of the tree flanked with two broad shelves that held the glasses and the refreshments which were sometimes served with the beer.



Rear view of the Ratti home at 42 East Street, Patch Hill, Proctor, Vermont

The neighborhood had numerous families of various nationalities. There were many Swedes, Irishmen, French Canadians, a German or two and then, the Italians. On a cool Saturday evening as many as fifteen or twenty men would assemble around the beer keg on the tree-house. They could buy the beer at Rutland, six miles away. Those were the days of prohibition, when Vermont had "Local Option." Rutland was wet and Proctor was dry. No one broke any laws!

As the evening grew cool, the beer level lowered in the keg, and they would begin to talk about life in the countries across the seas. Each nationality spoke of the happy times when the folks in each village would meet and sing and dance in the public squares. The Swedes would sing their native songs; the Irish would follow suit. The Italians would sing arias from some opera and the evening would end with everybody happy, no one drunk, and all with a feeling of good fellowship among the participants.

Dad was the ever astonishing center of our home. The French have an untranslatable expression that would describe him. They would say he was a "bout en train." Roughly, it describes a person who gets things going, makes life more interesting and gay. The French words describe Dad best.

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Manuscripts are invited: address correspondence to the Managing Editor.

Editor: Michael L. Austin

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ISSN 0748-2493

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